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Division of Forestry Offers Guidance for Homeowners Dealing with Storm-Damaged Trees

Frankfort, Ky.(March 29, 2012)– The severe storms and tornadoes of early March have left many communities and yards across Kentucky with damaged trees. In dealing with broken branches and split trunks, forestry officials advise that it is best to be cautious and learn the proper methods of caring for trees before taking action.

“After a storm, people often make two common mistakes when it comes to trees – improper pruning and trying to save those that are too badly damaged,” said Leah MacSwords, director of the Kentucky Division of Forestry (KDF). “In fact, many of Kentucky’s older landscape trees still bear the scars of the 1974 tornadoes when many trees were ‘topped’ or improperly pruned as an overreaction to tree damage.”

Topping, also known as “hat-racking” and “lopping” is the drastic removal or cutting back of large branches in mature trees, leaving open wounds and subjecting the tree to disease and decay. Topping is not only unsightly, it creates future hazards and will ultimately cause more expense and liability.

The opposite problem is trying to save a tree that has lost too much of its crown. It is important to properly assess the damage of the tree and determine whether there is a good chance for recovery. If the tree is basically healthy and vigorous, with major limbs and branches intact, and at least half of the tree’s crown remaining, then it will probably survive.

Before removing a tree of significant value – whether for shade or beauty – it's a good idea to get it evaluated by a certified arborist. Certified arborists must pass an exam administered by the International Society of Arboriculture. If you're in doubt about credentials, the Kentucky Arborist Association maintains a list of certified arborists for hire. To view the list, visit: <http://www.kyisatree.org/certifiedarborists.html>.

For consumers seeking a tree service company to help them with downed or damaged trees, the KDF offers the following tips:

- Hire a company that is bonded and insured and that has a certified arborist.
- Beware of door-knockers whose low prices may ultimately prove costly.
- Avoid hiring anyone who “tops” trees.
- Since arborists are in high demand after severe storms, it may pay to wait a while if the tree does not pose an immediate hazard.

For more tips on how to care for storm-damaged trees, please visit <http://forestry.ky.gov/LandownerServices/Pages/StormDamageInformation.aspx> or contact the KDF at 1-800-866-0555.

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